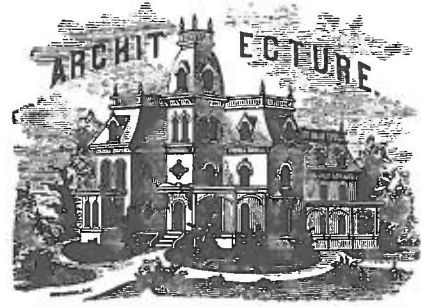


A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Richard Bond 1798-1861

Richard Bond, designer of the Portland Merchants Exchange and numerous buildings throughout New England and as far west as Ohio, was one of the most prolific Boston architects of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. His career represents the emerging professionalism of the period as housewrights and master builders graduated into the status of architect.

Born in Conway, Massachusetts, very little is known of Bond's early life and training. He first appears in the Boston Directory of 1825 as a housewright, affiliated with Freedom Whitman. The firm of Bond and Whitman was dissolved in 1826, the year of Bond's first major commission, Green Street Church, Boston.¹ Built in the late Federal style, the building is depicted in the painting of Major Melville's house, now in the Bostonian Society. Its construction was marked by tragedy, as two of the workmen were fatally injured during the collapse of a portion of the wall and roof. Bond joined the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Association as a housewright in 1829. He next appears as the contractor of the First Parish Church in Plymouth in 1831, a Gothic Revival edifice designed by George Brimmer. Brimmer had designed Trinity Church on Summer Street two years previously, one of the first granite Gothic Revival structures of a type which, partly as a result of Bond's widespread adoption of the style in his church commissions, became ubiquitous during the next two decades.

In 1833 Bond became associated with Isaiah Rogers, architect of the well-known hotel, the Tremont House.² After Rogers' relocation to New York to oversee the construction of the Astor House in 1834, Bond appears to have inherited the firm's Boston projects and gained additional major commissions in the decade, including Lewis Wharf of 1834-38, the Merchants Exchange in Portland of 1835-39, Gore Hall at Harvard College of 1836-38,

and Salem City Hall of 1836-37. Constructed of granite, a material of increasing popularity in this period, these buildings enhanced the reputation of Richard Bond, and in 1836 he was invited to attend the first meeting of the American Institute of Architects, the predecessor of the American Institute of Architects, held in New York City.

The Merchants Exchange was arguably the finest Greek Revival building in northern New England (Figures 1 & 2). How Bond secured the commission in Portland is not known, but it was undoubtedly due to his growing practice and professional reputation. The Portland businessmen who proposed the Exchange had an ulterior motive in their undertaking: to woo the state government back to Portland by providing a suitable building for a capitol.³ Construction delays brought on by the Panic of 1837 resulted in the sale of the unfinished building to the City of Portland, which, under the leadership of Mayor Levi Cutter, completed the structure according to a slightly revised interior plan. With its monumental octostyle Ionic colonade and impressive saucer dome, the sienite granite Exchange was a prominent landmark in the port city. Its interior functioned as the Courthouse, Post Office, and Custom House, the latter occupying the great rotunda room open to the dome. The design of the Portland Exchange is clearly derived from the New York Merchants Exchange, designed contemporaneously by Bond's former partner, Isaiah Rogers, in 1836-42. The loss of the building by fire on January 8, 1854, removed this monument to Portland's rise to prominence in the first half of the nineteenth century.

During the construction of the Portland Exchange, Bond provided plans for a market building in Bangor, a short-lived project aborted by the financial Panic of 1837. With amphi-prostyle porticos and a domed central pavilion, the design of the building was inspired by Quincy Market in Boston, completed ten years earlier by Alexander Parris. The market was subsequently completed according to a different scheme.⁴

The Bond office specialized in ecclesiastical architecture, as evidenced by its numerous church com-

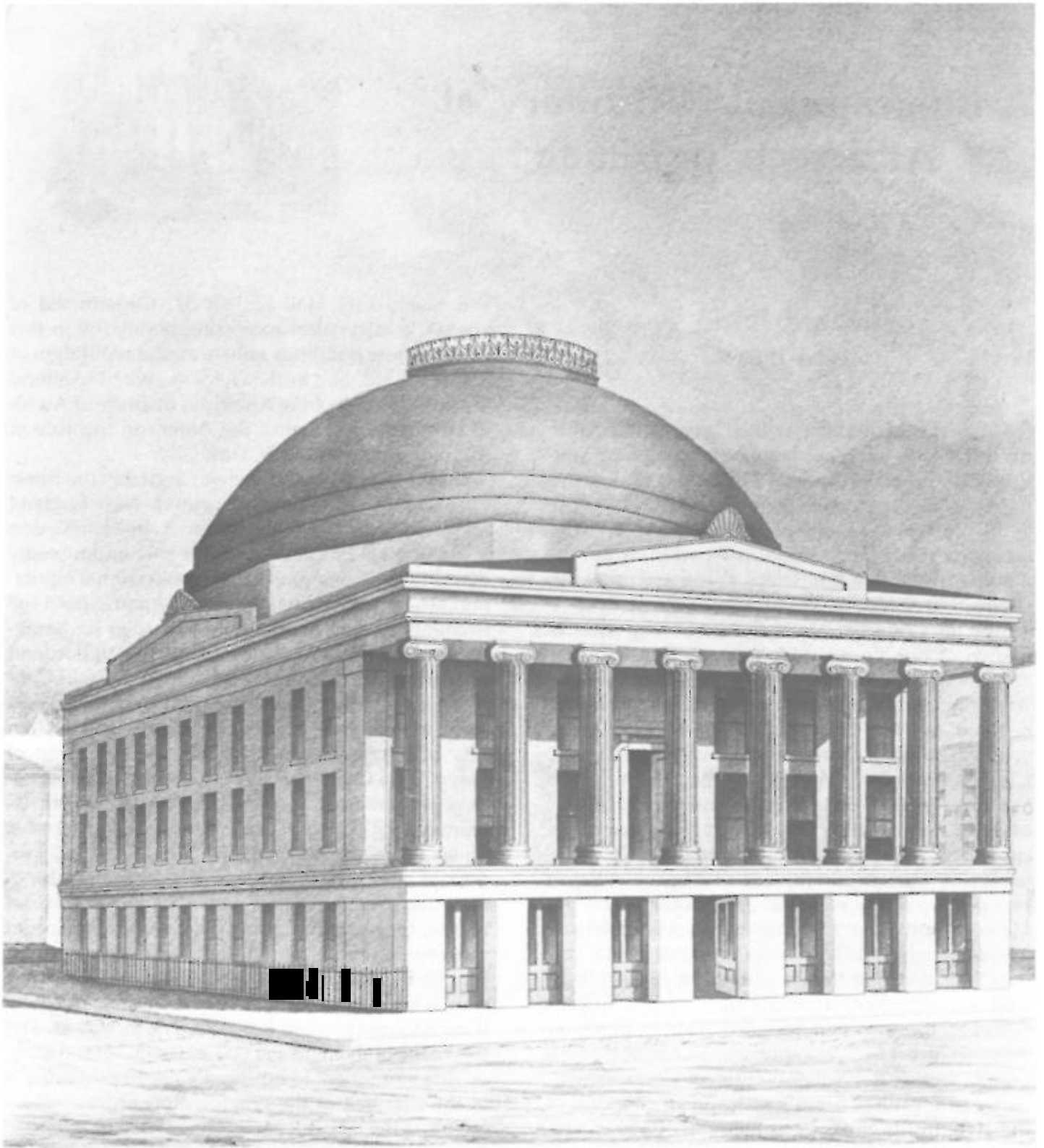


Figure 1. Merchants Exchange, Portland, mid-19th century drawing (MHPC).

missions. As a body the works are competent and well designed, and, in many cases, striking examples of Greek, Gothic, and Italianate styles. In Maine, Bond produced a Gothic design for the Third Congregational Church in Portland in 1847, an unrealized scheme.⁵ His plan for the remodeling of the Free Street Baptist Church in Portland in 1856 is representative of the transitional quality characteristic of his work in the latter part of his career.

The Free Street Church had been founded by eight members of the Federal Street Society who purchased the Portland Theatre in December, 1835. The Greek Revival style building with its distyle in antis Ionic portico was suitably remodeled for church purposes, but growth in the congregation necessitated further remodeling twenty years later. Bond added a brick Italianate style front, thus bringing the building out to the sidewalk (Figure 3). A 185 foot high steeple at the right corner was balanced by the placement of a lower rusticated tower at the opposite corner. The walls were rough plastered and scored to resemble stone. With its crowning spire and its location near Congress Square, Free Street was a major Portland landmark, and its design appears to have influenced later church architecture in Maine. A rendering of it appeared in *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion* in 1857. Its steeple remained a prominent fixture on the Portland skyline until its removal following a severe gale in 1876. The church was later sold and remodeled by John Calvin Stevens

and John Howard Stevens in a Neo-classical style inspired by the original appearance of the building when it was constructed nearly a century earlier. Since its 1926 remodeling by the Stevens firm, it has served as the Chamber of Commerce.⁶

Bond entered a design in the competition for a new Portland City Hall in 1858, a commission won by another Bostonian, James H. Rand. No drawings are known to exist of the Bond design, which is the last known activity of a professional career which spanned four decades. He retired to his home in Roxbury, outside of Boston, where he died on August 23, 1861.

Fire, economic hardship, and changing tastes account for the disappearance of Bond's buildings in Maine. The fateful accident during the building of Green Street Church early in his career and the calamitous destruction of his Portland Exchange in the later years of his life in no way diminish the significance of his accomplishments as a rising star who graduated from housewright to architect in the early days of the profession, and one whose numerous commissions served to disseminate the high-style urbanism in Boston to the regional centers of New England in a period of major growth and expansion in the New Republic. In addition, architects who trained with Bond, including Charles Edward Parker and Alexander R. Estey, would join the ranks of the Boston architectural establishment in the second half of the nineteenth century. The



Figure 2. Middle Street, Portland, with the Merchants Exchange at the left, late 1840s daguerreotype by George M. Howe (Courtesy of Maine Historical Society).

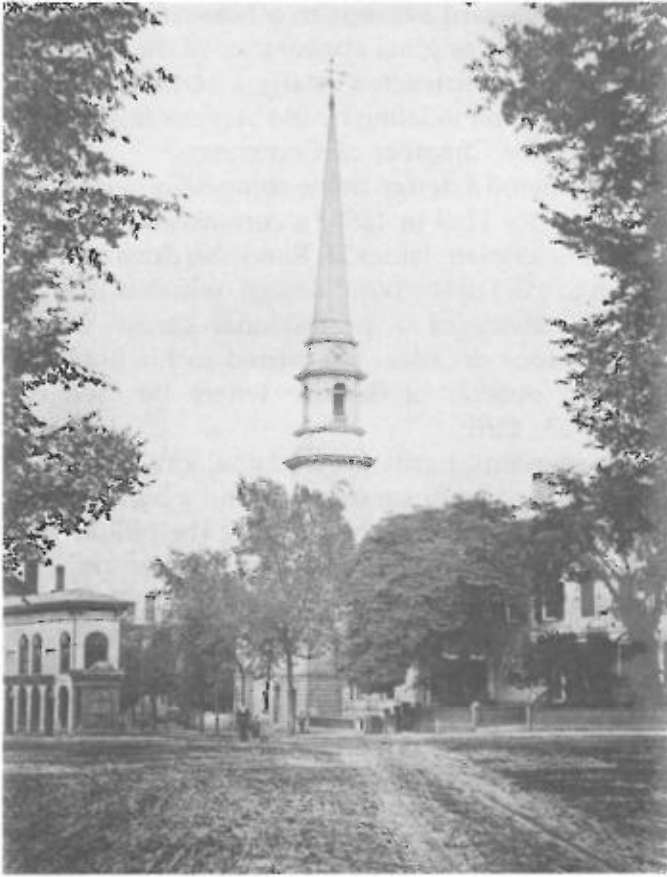


Figure 3. Free Street Baptist Church, Portland,
c. 1875 view (MHPC).

considerable pride which characterized the spirit of the age is best epitomized in the Latin inscription on the copper tablet found among the charred remains of the Portland Exchange after the fire in 1854. Listing the names of the public officials who presided over its construction, it concludes with name of the architect, "Ricardus Bond, Architectus".

Stephen Jerome

NOTES

- ¹ Bond, Henry, *Family Memorials: Genealogies of the Families and Descendants of the Early Settlers of Watertown*, 1853, p. 75.
- ² Myers, Denys Peter, "Isaiah Rogers 1800-1869", *A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine*, Vol. III, No. 2, 1986. For Green Street see Bowen, Abel, *Bowen's Picture of Boston*, 1829, pp. 164-67. For Bond and Rogers' design relationship, see Jerome, Stephen, "65 St. James Street, Roxbury", *Boston Preservation Alliance Letter*, Vol. 6, No. 5, May, 1985, pp. 7-8.
- ³ Beard, Frank A. and Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., *The Maine State House: A Brief History and Guide*, 1981.
- ⁴ Mundy, James H. and Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., *The Flight of the Grand Eagle: Charles G. Bryant, Maine Architect and Adventurer*, 1977; Thompson, Deborah, *Bangor, Maine 1769-1914: An Architectural History*, 1988, p. 193.
- ⁵ Third Parish records, account books, and miscellaneous papers, Maine Historical Society, Portland.
- ⁶ Shettleworth, Earle G., Jr., "Peter Grain, Sr., c. 1786-?", *A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine*, Vol. I, No. 10, 1984.

LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY RICHARD BOND

Merchants Exchange, Portland, 1835-39, Destroyed.
Market Hall, Bangor, 1836-37, Not Executed.
Third Congregational Church, Portland, 1847, Not Executed.
Free Street Baptist Church, 1856, Remodelling, Completely Altered.
City Hall, Portland, 1858, Not Executed.

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